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Gugu

Evidence from Folk Zoological Nomenclature and Classification for a Mystery Primate in Southern Sumatra

Gregory Forth

Abstract. – *Gugu* is one of several names applied to a mystery primate from southern Sumatra, nowadays better known as *orang pendek*, which was first identified in the European literature over 200 years ago. The article reviews western reports of *gugu*, paying particular attention to linguistic evidence compiled by the missionary-ethnologist L. W. Jennissen and recorded in the Holle lists and, implicitly, in O. L. Helfrich's published dictionary of the Besemah language. It is thereby shown how the Besemah representation of *gugu* can be fully understood only as a component of their folk classification of primates, and that, whatever the empirical referent of the name, for local Sumatrans this is a real creature ontologically comparable to locally known and zoologically recognized primates and not, for example, a spiritual being. A further conclusion is that *gugu* and comparable Sumatran terms most likely denote an ape, and possibly a recently extant southern population of orang-utans (*Pongo pygmaeus*) – the interpretation evidently reached by both Jennissen and Helfrich. *[Sumatra, Besemah language and culture, mystery primates, folk classification and nomenclature, ethnozoology, orang-utans]*

Gregory Forth, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Alberta and Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, has for nearly 40 years been conducting ethnographic fieldwork on the eastern Indonesian islands of Flores and Sumba. On this basis he has published several books and numerous articles dealing mostly with kinship, religion, traditional narrative, and folk zoology. His most recent book is "Images of the Wildman in Southeast Asia. An Anthropological Perspective" (London 2008), republished in paperback in 2012. – See also Ref. Cited.

Introduction

For well over two centuries, Europeans have been recording local reports of a mystery hominoid, a sort of ape-man, inhabiting remote forests in southern Sumatra. At least since the 1920s, the creature has become known to English and other European readers mostly by the Malay name *orang pendek* (short man, person), a designation likely to recall "orangutan," referring to the far better known Sumatran ape *Pongo pygmaeus*.[1] Many Dutch commentators writing in the early twentieth century dismissed the orang pendek as a myth or false report possibly based on exaggerated encounters with sun-bears, known primates, or forest-dwelling humans. This view has been developed by recent historians (Gouda 1995; Cribb 2007) who have construed the creature as a projection of colonial or more recent Western values and interests. Such interpretations of course tend to ignore Sumatran views of the category, including local convictions that the creatures exist as an empirical animal. By contrast, primatologist David Chivers and his associates, referring in part to claimed native sightings, have argued that the name denotes a large undiscovered primate, possibly a gibbon or relative of the orangutan whose appearance is more human than any ape so far described (Chivers 1995; Martyr et al. n. d.). In a similar vein, other primate specialists have interpreted reports of orang pendek as reflecting an extremely rare southern variety of orangutan in several respects distinct from the Sumatran population that survives north of Lake Toba (Rijksen and Meijaard

1 I use this binomial throughout in reference to the orang-utan. Some taxonomists (e.g., Groves 2001) reserve this name for the Bornean orangutan and classify the apes on Sumatra as a separate species, *Pongo abelii*. Others, however, classify the latter as a sub-species, *P. pygmaeus abelii*.

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1999). The present article reviews linguistic and other evidence indicating that, even if the mystery creature does not substantially reflect an empirical primate, either known or unknown to modern science, in the view of local Sumatrans it is a real creature ontologically comparable to other locally known and recognized primate kinds and not, for example, a spiritual or supernatural being. Otherwise expressed, the aim is to show how the *orang pendek* can be properly understood only in the context of a folk classification of primates.

A Brief History of Names

While "orang pendek" has become the best known designation for the mystery hominoid, in the earliest European writings the creature was known by a quite different name, in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) best transcribed as "gugu." In fact, it was under this name, rendered as "googoo," that the creature was introduced to Europeans by William Marsden in "The History of Sumatra," first published in 1783. Taking the referent to be a "species of people," the author further refers to these as "orang gugu," thus incorporating the Malay term for "man, person, people." Marsden's report remains interesting for several reasons. For one thing, he identified the gugu's habitat as the vicinity of Bencoolen (more correctly Bengkulu), where he was stationed as an officer of the British East India Company. Secondly, Marsden was sceptical about the creature's existence, although he judiciously allowed that it "probably has some foundation in truth, but is exaggerated in the circumstances." For present purposes, a particular interest lies in a remark implying a link with the orangutan; for Marsden, reflecting on native reports of gugu, concludes that the creatures differ "in little but the use of speech from the orangutan of Borneo" (1783: 35; Forth 2008: 119). To this one must straightaway add that the large majority of subsequent accounts of the mystery hominoid do not in fact credit it with speech – a circumstance that could of course imply the absence of any substantial difference between the creature and the known ape.

After Marsden, gugu were first mentioned again by the Anglo-American adventurer Walter Gibson, who incorrectly transcribed the name as "gugur" and who, circumstances suggest, may have derived part of his account from Marsden. The main interest of Gibson's report is his claim actually to have seen a group of "gugur" moving through trees above a creek off the Musi River, not far from Pulau Rimau on Sumatra's southeast coast. Gibson's companion, a Malay boatman, identified what they observed as "big monkeys" and as "orang hutan." As the latter term is a form of the name that has entered English and other languages as "orangutan," it might simply be concluded that the Malay took these to be specimens of *Pongo pygmaeus*, and indeed this conclusion accords with Gibson's description of their size, form, and arboreal habit (Forth 2008: 119). But as we shall later see, the matter is more complicated, as local Sumatran usage suggests this may not be the only referent of "orang hutan," or "man of the woods."

Twentieth-century sources confirm gugu as the local name for the creature elsewhere known as "orang pendek" in several dialects of southwestern Sumatra (see Hagen 1908, citing an unpublished report by the Dutch colonial administrator Saijers; Coomans de Ruiter 1929). Among these is the language of Besemah (in older writings written as "Pesemah," "Pasemah," "Passumah," or "Passemah"). However, as a reference to some sort of apelike creature or primate, there is an earlier occurrence of "gugu" which has so far been overlooked. This appears in a list of Besemah names for primates in the dialect of Besemah Ulu Manna, spoken by the ethnic group of the same name. Ulu Manna denotes the headwaters of the river Manna that flows to the coastal settlement of Manna, some 75 km south of Bengkulu (Bencoolen), where Marsden was stationed in the late eighteenth century. Like the hinterland of Bengkulu, Besemah Ulu Manna forms part of the Barisan range, the main locus of reports and reputed sightings of "orang pendek." The list of names was compiled, apparently in the last decade of the nineteenth century, by the Jesuit missionary-linguist Leonardus W. Jennissen (1852–1927), who was stationed in the Besemah highlands at Tanjong Sakti. Forming part of a folk zoological classification, it is the implications of Jennissen's linguistic evidence for the ontological status of the creature called gugu (and by extension "orang pendek") that are the primary object of the present essay. After evaluating Jennissen's materials, I review more recent, complementary evidence relevant to the referents of gugu which also have not been considered so far.

Jennissen was not the first author to construe a local name for a southern Sumatran mystery hominoid as a reference to an attested species of nonhuman primate. In the first comprehensive scientific description of the ape, Schlegel and Müller (1839–44) interpreted "orang panda" (an obvious variant of "orang pendek") as a southwestern Sumatran name for the orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*). Actually, the existence or survival of this ape in the southern re-

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gions where names like "orang pendek" and "gugu" are in use is not confirmed for the twentieth century, while for the nineteenth century the evidence is patchy and partial at best (see Forth 2008; also Rijksen and Meijaard 1999). Nevertheless, Oscar Helfrich, the accomplished linguist and colonial administrator (later to become Governor of Curaçao) subsequently made the same identification. Thus, in dictionaries published in 1904 and 1927(a), Helfrich glossed Besemah "goegoe" (the Dutch transcription of "gugu") as "mayas," and "mawas," two forms of the Malay name for the ape known in English as orangutan.

In a recent book comparing the Sumatran figure with hominoids reported from other parts of Indonesia (Forth 2008), I suggested that Helfrich's gloss "probably reflects no more than the supposition informing Schlegel and Müller's interpretation [of 'orang panda']" (Forth 2008: 301; note 31). Since publishing this opinion it has become clear that a far more likely source of the gloss is Jennissen's work, for as will be shown, Jennissen was a significant contributor to Helfrich's lexicographical project. By the same token, all indications are that, rather than a "supposition," Helfrich's identification of gugu with the orangutan (or with some species of primate he took to be the orangutan) was almost certainly grounded in knowledge of Besamah usage, gained either directly or from Jennissen, which indicated that native speakers applied gugu to some sort of ape or ape-like primate.

The Evidence of the Primate List

As I later show, there is every indication that when he compiled his list of primate names, Jennissen had a sound knowledge of the Besemah language, and that the lexicon reflects several years of linguistic and ethnographic experience in the region. Jennissen's data form part of the Holle lists, word registers from numerous Indonesian languages generated from target terms in Dutch and Malay compiled by K. F. Holle (1829–1896), a member of a plantation family based in West Java (Stokhof 1980–87). The lists were edited by W. A. L. Stokhof, and published in several volumes during the 1980s (see Stokhof 1980–87). Jennissen's list of primate names was given in response to Holle's Dutch target "aap" which translates Malay/Bahasa Indonesian "monyet, kera."[2] Although usually referring to monkeys, both "kera" and "monyet" are further applied to apes (e.g., gibbons and orangutans). Similarly, Dutch *aap* equally covers what English speakers, or at least those knowledgeable of modern zoology, nowadays distinguish as "apes" and "monkeys."[3] For most Indonesian languages recorded in Holle, contributors supply just one term for "monkey/ape," a circumstance partly reflecting the paucity of primate species in many parts of the archipelago. However, for Besemah Ulu Manna Jennissen supplies as many as seven. Among these is "gogoh," corresponding to the term phonetically transcribed as "gugu."

Table 1 lists all seven primate names in the order given by Jennissen, together with standard Malay or national Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia) equivalents, English names, and scientific identifications. The Besemah terms invite several observations. Except for "gugu" (which I hereafter write for Jennissen's "gogoh"), there is no indication that the names refer to anything other than scientifically attested species of monkeys or apes. All moreover have recognizable cognates in standard Malay that apply to species occurring in southern Sumatra, while the primatological literature[4] indicates that the six terms Jennissen lists in addition to gugu are comprehensive of the variety of monkey and ape taxa (families, genera, species) occurring in the Besemah highlands. Other than Horsfield's tarsier (*Tarsius bancanus*) and the Sunda slow loris (*Nycticebus coucang*) – lower primate kinds which can be left out of account here – there is thus every indication that the terms represent a complete folk primatological nomenclature for Besemah and its associated folk zoology. Whitten et al. (2000; cf. Groves 2001) list 10 species of apes and monkeys for Sumatra (excluding the Mentawai Islands), counting the two gibbons *Hylobates lar* and *Hylobates agilis* as separate species. Only *Hylobates agilis* – sometimes classified as a subspecies of *Hylobates lar* – occurs south of Lake

2 Malay terms were added only to the later 1931 edition of Holle's target lists, whereas Jennissen's list was published in the 1904 edition, reissued without change in 1911. For the earlier editions, as Stokhof remarks (1980/I: 17), "it was planned that the lists would be completed by Dutch civil servants, officers, missionaries, and 'intelligent natives' (intelligente Inlanders) such as village heads, merchants and teachers, in practice all people with a reasonable knowledge of Dutch."

3 All Old World monkeys compose a single family, the Cercopithecidae, which according to current primate taxonomy is the only family within the superfamily Cercopithecoidea. Apes compose two families within the superfamily Hominoidea: the Hylobatidae, or gibbons, and the Hominidae, or great apes. The latter then comprises two subfamilies: Ponginae, or orangutans, and Homininae, which includes the African great apes and members of the genus Homo (Groves 2001: 196, 287–309). Not least because apes, by contrast to the large majority of monkeys, have no visible tails and are generally larger, they more closely resemble humans than do monkeys.

4 E.g., Wolfheim (1983); Whitten et al. (2000); Groves (2001).

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Table 1: Primate Terms in Besemah.

Jennissen's Term	IPA Transcription	Standard Malay/Indonesian	English Name	Scientific Name	Helfrich's (1904, 1939) Gloss (in English Translation)*
begrŏ	bəɣoʔ	beruk	pig-tailed macaque	*Macaca nemestrina*	"Lampong ape,"** "a large, very trainable monkey"
kegrĕ	kəɣə	kera	long-tailed macaque (also general term for "monkey")	*Macaca fascicularis*	"monkey, especially the long-tailed monkey"
siamang	sijamaŋ	siamang	siamang gibbon	*Hylobates syndactylus* also designated *Symphalangus syndactylus*	"black gibbon", "black ape with long arms"
sinpaj	simpaj	simpai	banded (or mitred) leaf monkey	*Presbytis melalophos*	"langur" (another general term for "leaf monkey")
oewewĕ	wəwə	wauwau or wakwak	agile or black-handed gibbon	*Hylobates agilis*, alternatively *Hylobates lar agilis*	*wĕwĕ*, also *oewĕwĕ*, "grey-coloured gibbon"
sjinkok	ʧɪŋkʊk	céngkok	silvered leaf monkey	*Presbytis cristatus*, also *Trachy-pithecus cristatus*	*tjingkoq*, "a kind of monkey"
gogoh	gugu	no equivalent other than "orang pendek"	none	Unidentified. *Pongo pygmaeus*?	**goegoh*, also *goegoq*, "orangutan"

* Translations from Helfrich's Dutch glosses are by Gregory Forth. The IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) transcriptions were supplied by Bradley McDonnell (pers. comm. April 2010). The /j/ in the IPA system (see, e.g., "sijamang") represents the palatal glide (in English usually written as /y/), the same sound as represented by /j/ in Jennissen's and Helfrich's Dutch transcriptions. The terminal /e/ in Jennissen's "kegrĕ" (cf. IPA "kəɣə") corresponds to the schwa, as does the /e/ in the first syllable. Jennissen's /gr/ (written with an upper case /g/ in Helfrich's transcription) represents a voiced velar fricative, nowadays sometimes written as /gh/ (see Kasmansyah et al. 1999) and other times as /r/. It corresponds to the /r/ in standard Malay (see "kera").

** "Lampong ape" (or more accurately, "Lampong monkey") is an old name for the pig-tailed macaque, a monkey that can grow to a fairly large size and in Sumatra and Java is commonly trained to pick coconuts, hence the further designation "coconut monkey" (see Gudger 1923: 274, citing Weber-van Bosse 1905). Lampong is the district that includes Sumatra's southernmost tip.

Toba; hence *Hylobates agilis* is evidently the gibbon kind denoted by Besemah "oewewĕ." The siamang, a much larger, sympatric gibbon species is then designated with a Besemah variant of the Malay term which has been adopted as the English name for *Hylobates syndactylus*, nowadays often assigned its own genus as *Symphalangus syndactylus*. Of the four Sumatran leaf monkeys (genus *Presbytis*), only two are found in the Besemah highlands: *Presbytis cristata* and *Presbytis melalophos*. Excluding the orangutan, currently recorded only for northern Sumatra, this of course leaves just six primate species in the region occupied by Besemah speakers.

What significance may attach to the order in which Jennissen lists the Besemah categories is unclear. The two macaques are mentioned first. However, the two gibbons are separated, as are the two leaf monkeys (or "langurs"), and there is otherwise little suggestion that the listing follows any particular classificatory principle or pattern, for example in terms of size, perceptual similarity, or even rarity. That gugu (gogoh) is recorded last could reflect its peripherality in relation to some conceptual grouping of primates in general. Certainly, this or some other distinctive placement would be expectable if the category were identified with the orangutan or a similarly large primate.

Like equivalents in other Malayic languages, two of the six Besemah terms are probable onomatopes. "Keghe" (Malay "kera") imitates the scream of the long-tailed macaque (see Zorc 1994: 579 who reconstructs "provisional PMP" **keraq*, "scream of a

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monkey"), while "oewewĕ" (cf. Helfrich's "wewe"; standard Malay "wawa, wakwak") resembles the call of a gibbon. Gugu may be similarly onomatopoeic; thus Barendregt (2005: 271) describes the "guguh" (or "seguguh"), which he takes to be an imaginary creature, as being named after a nocturnal "screaming sound guh, guh." Native accounts of the southern Sumatran mystery hominoid associate this with several vocalizations, among which is a two-toned "u-u" (Anonymous 1924), and a possibly identical call reproduced as "hu-hu-hu" (Coomans de Ruiter 1929: 20). Yet similar sounds have been attributed to siamangs (Bakels 2000: 123 f.), other gibbons, and orangutans (Forth 2008: 124). The similarity of "gugu" to Florenese "gogo" in "ebu gogo," the name of a locally recognized extinct hominoid that has been linked with the recently discovered subfossil *Homo floresiensis* (Forth 2005, 2008), is almost certainly coincidental. The Florenese, or more specifically Nage, name is not considered onomatopoeic but is explained with reference to the hominoid's reputed voraciousness.

In two sources, the name of the southern Sumatran creature is written as "segugu [segoegoe]" (Coomans de Ruiter 1929: 3) or "seguguh" (Barendregt 2005; 2002: 304). In Malay and other Malayic languages, the prefix "se-" means "one" (as in "sebuah," "one fruit") and further expresses ideas of similarity, identity, and unity, but its function in this context is unclear.[5] It may be significant, however, that another southern Sumatran name for the mystery hominoid, "sedapa," apparently incorporates the same prefix followed by a root that has sometimes been compared to Malay "depa" (cf. Besemah "dĕpĕ"), "fathom" (the width of the outstretched arms).[6]

Jennissen's Knowledge of Besemah and of Primates

Jennissen himself provides no translation for any of the seven terms he listed for Holle. This is not surprising: Holle's minimal aim was to provide equivalents of single Dutch and Malay terms in different Indonesian languages, and where a source provided more than one in a given language, these are often not distinguished. Owing to the absence of glosses, we cannot know what Jennissen himself understood by "gugu," but since all seven terms are left undefined, it cannot be assumed that he did not equate it with a particular local primate any more than this assumption can be made of any of the other six terms. In addition, it is very probable that Jennissen was the source of Helfrich's identification of the term with Malay "mayas," or "mawas," that is, the orangutan, or at any rate that the two authorities concurred in this identification.

The extent of Jennissen's influence on Helfrich is easily judged from the lexicographer's remarks in the preface to his 1904 dictionary, dated December 1899. Here Helfrich (1904: iv) states:

> I would like to express my thanks to Pastor L. W. Jennissen for his kindness in always assisting me in tracing the meaning of various words, and for verifying whether meanings I had provided were correct or incorrect.

As Helfrich further explains, he places the letter "J" after numerous entries in order to indicate that Jennissen was the source of a particular gloss. This does not mean, however, that the missionary assisted Helfrich only in these instances, for the previous quote indicates that Jennissen's contribution was much more extensive. There is indeed no "J" after Helfrich's entry for "gugu." Still, the latter's prefatory remarks strongly suggest that, if not the source, then Jennissen would at least have confirmed "majas" (denoting the orangutan) as the referent of the Besemah term. Chronology is important here. Curiously, the Holle lists (Stokhof 1980–87/X.2: 87) record the "year of investigation" for Jennissen's Besemah lexicon as 1904, thus the same year as Helfrich's dictionary appeared. However, at the bottom of the same page (p. 87), it is noted that Jennissen's list "has been handed in already 6 ⟨8?⟩ years ago." This indicates that compilation was completed six or eight years before 1904, thus either in 1896 or 1898, and that Jennissen compiled the list in response to the first edition of Holle's register of Dutch terms issued in 1894.[7] A date 1896

5 Bradley McDonnell (pers. comm. 18 October 2011) suggests that the prefix in "segugu" may have become lexicalized, so that the word does not differ in meaning from "gugu." On the other hand, it is just possible that this form conveys the sense of "the gugu," thus using the singular to denote an entire species.

6 After his description of the Siamang gibbon as a "black ape with long arms," Helfrich (1904) refers the reader to Besemah "dĕpĕ" (fathom). Although the lexicographer's intention is opaque, the reference does rather recall "sedapa" as a local name for a mystery hominoid that more recent writers have compared to a large gibbon.

7 The uncertainty regarding the numerals most likely reflects the fact that the original note was handwritten (Stokhof states that pointed brackets serve to indicate, among other things, "doubts" on his own part). Who made the notation is not entirely clear. It falls under a section labelled "Other details" comprising inter alia "more general remarks" supplied by "the researcher" (Stokhof 1980/I: 18), which in this case presumably refers to Jennissen himself. The note goes on to state that "a very useful work for consultation is: O. L. Stelfrich

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or 1898 makes sense, as Jennissen worked in Tanjong Sakti, in the Besemah highlands, from 22 July 1891 to 12 November 1898, although he visited his old station regularly from his subsequent posting in Padang, and worked there again from 5 December 1901 until 25 May 1912 (Van Aernsbergen 1934). The earlier dates also explain why it was Jennissen, rather than Helfrich, who was requested to complete the Holle list for Besemah. Indeed, the extent to which Helfrich relied on Jennissen's assistance leaves little doubt that, at the time Helfrich was compiling his dictionary, Jennissen was the more knowledgeable of the Besemah language.

The significance of Jennissen's folk primatological lexicon for the identification of the creature named "gugu" obviously depends on the extent of his familiarity not only with the Besemah language but also with the people, their country, and culture. As noted, Jennissen spent over seven years in Tanjong Sakti and subsequently maintained contact with the region for another eleven years. Jennissen's knowledge of Besemah culture and society can be judged from a series of articles he published on Besemah folk religion, shamanism, and magic (1893, 1895, 1901, 1904). His 1904 article deals with local marriage practice, focusing on suicide among brides in arranged marriages, a topic also mentioned briefly by his predecessor in Tanjong Sakti, Van Meurs (1891: 67). Jennissen's translations of ritual addresses in his 1893 article suggest that he already possessed a good knowledge of the Besemah language by this time. His writings also contain an extensive catalogue of indigenous spiritual beings and other spiritual concepts recognized by the Besemah despite their partial conversion to Islam, while additional spirit categories are included in the word list he compiled for Holle. As this is not the place for a detailed review of these materials, it may be sufficient to note that Jennissen's corpus, both his published articles and his Holle list, contains descriptions of over a dozen categories of spiritual beings, nearly all of which are named, as well as four terms referring to souls, or aspects of the human soul. One category of spirits, the "mountain spirits" (orang gunung [goenoeng]), even receives mention in his article on marital suicide (1904), as entities Besemah blame for luring new brides to their deaths.

Jennissen's detailed knowledge of Besemah spirit categories has a particular significance for his understanding of their folk primatological categories. If "gugu" does not refer to an empirical animal, then there would appear to be just two other possibilities. The first is a category of human beings, an interpretation I have discussed elsewhere (Forth 2008) and which can be dismissed as the primary source of the image denoted by the term. The second possibility is that "gugu" denotes a largely or entirely imaginary being, and more specifically a spirit. It is a point of considerable import, then, that nowhere in his discussion of categories of spirits does Jennissen mention "gugu" or anything that suggests the mystery hominoid to which this and the synonymous "orang pendek" refer. It is similarly significant that Helfrich, in a lengthy unpublished manuscript on the Besemah region, culture, and language (1939) also makes no reference to gugu, particularly in his chapter 3 on indigenous religion where he too describes a variety of spiritual entities; nor are gugu mentioned in Helfrich's monograph on South Sumatran folklore (1927b). Since by all indications Jennissen had a solid knowledge of local religion, if Besemah had ever represented gugu as spiritual beings it is highly likely that he would have mentioned the category in this context, and equally unlikely that he would have listed the term, simply, as the name of a kind of primate. It is, therefore, reasonable to infer that local people never described gugu to him as anything other than an empirical animal – some kind of an ape – or, otherwise expressed, that gugu was only ever represented to the missionary in a thoroughly naturalistic manner and in a way that led him to conclude that the referent was a nonhuman primate.

Historically, it is also important that both Jennissen and Helfrich recorded "gugu" as a primate name well before the colonial controversy initiated largely by Jacobson's report of human-like footprints ascribed by Sumatran trackers to the "sedapa" or "orang pendek" (Jacobson 1917, 1918). In part, the ensuing debate was shaped by Dubois' discovery in 1893 of the fossil "ape-man" *Pithecanthropus* (now classified as *Homo erectus*). Neither Jennissen (who as noted recorded "gugu" in the 1890s, thus before Dubois' discovery had become widely known) nor Helfrich could, therefore, have had any interest in advancing any particular interpretation of the nature of the mystery creature. Indeed, when the two linguists wrote, the gugu was, by all indications, not a mystery at all.

The extent of Jennissen's knowledge of Besemah language and culture is further illuminated by the fact that he was preceded in the Besemah region by

[sic]," and then lists an article by O. L. Helfrich (1904). The mistake in Helfrich's name also suggests a misinterpretation of handwriting, possibly made by the typist, A. E. Almanar, who assisted Stokhof in editing the lists (1980/I: 145). While it is surprising that Stokhof did not correct this, it is inconceivable that Jennissen would have misspelled Helfrich's name. A comparable mistake concerns Jennissen's own name, the initials of which are given as W. L. rather than L. W.

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J. P. N. van Meurs (1838–1891), another Dutch missionary whose help also receives prefatory acknowledgement from Helfrich (1904: iv). Stationed in Tanjong Sakti from 1887 until 1891, when he died in Sukabumi, van Meurs was in fact the first Jesuit missionary to receive permission from the colonial government to work in the Besemah highlands. The permit, however, did not extend to "proper missionary work" but allowed only "socio-linguistic explorations" (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008: 627), a required concentration which suggests van Meurs would have possessed considerable knowledge of Besemah language and culture by the time Jennissen succeeded him in 1891. And, as there is no indication that the terms of the permit changed during his successor's tenure, the point would apply in at least equal measure to Jennissen.

Van Meurs composed a grammar and dictionary of Besemah and published several articles, including a report of nearly 100 pages on the Besemah region and culture (1891). He never completed his Besemah dictionary, and what he did complete appears not to have survived.[8] Nevertheless, in a letter written in 1889 to his superior, Father Provincial Frederik Heynen S. J., van Meurs (1888–1891) mentions that the list of words he had so far compiled was sufficient for his own purposes and for that of his successor. Whether van Meurs recorded Besemah names for primates, or indeed the term "gugu," we shall probably never know. But whatever specific knowledge of Besemah Jennissen may have derived from van Meurs' writings, it is evident that he was able to build upon the linguistic efforts of his predecessor. Jennissen's knowledge of the language was, therefore, greater when he compiled the Holle list (in 1896 or 1898) than it would have been had he started from scratch on his arrival in Tanjong Sakti in 1891. The point equally applies to Jennissen's knowledge of the Besemah people and culture, including their indigenous religion. In his 1891 report, van Meurs devoted 35 pages (1891: 253–287) to local religious beliefs and practices, including descriptions of spiritual beings – and as with his successor's work on the same topics, nowhere in this context does the author refer to the gugu or anything similar.

It is possible that Jennissen's knowledge of Besemah folk primatological nomenclature derived largely or even entirely from van Meurs's researches. But in that case, what applies to the work of one Dutch missionary-linguist would apply equally to the other, particularly in regard to a late-nineteenth-century Western understanding of the category "gugu." In his 1891 article, van Meurs includes a brief description of local fauna (1891: 451 f.), but in this he makes no mention of primates of any sort.

Other Sources on Gugu

Complementing Jennissen's folk primatological nomenclature are two other sources of information on "gugu," both of which provide further illumination of the ontological status of the category for southern Sumatrans. In a doctoral thesis entitled "Besemah Concepts," anthropologist William Collins (1979) recounts a myth concerning the Besemah hero Serunting, also known as "Bitter Tongue." The story includes Serunting's encounter with "a group of creatures called *gugu* or *orang hutan* (literally jungle man or the ape orang-utan)" which is said to have taken place upriver from Bintuhan, a coastal settlement about 100 miles to the south of Bengkulu (1979: 33). After the gugu invite Serunting to share wild fruits they are eating, the hero, impressed by their generosity, declares "these creatures are not *gugu* (apes), rather they are *orang hutan* (humans who live in the jungle)." Following this declaration "the *gugu* became humans, but of short stature and with a large chin and a little forehead" (Collins 1979: 33 f.).

Although specifying the referent as a type of human, Collins's gloss of "orang hutan" in fact accords with Sumatran descriptions of gugu and orang pendek (see Forth 2008: 118–127), particularly in regard to their short stature and the "little" (presumably meaning "low") forehead. The "large chin" is not a usual attribute, but it is a reasonable speculation that the phrase may actually refer to a large jaw. Collins's account is further curious insofar as, in the first instance, "gugu" and "orang hutan" are presented as synonyms, whereas in the mythical hero's subsequent declaration, the first term is glossed as referring specifically to "apes" (or orang-utans) while the second designates a separate category of human beings (albeit ones who live in jungle and have a distinctive physical appearance) into which the apes are subsequently transformed. The partial conflation is reminiscent of earlier accounts by Marsden and Gibson, in which nonhuman creatures called "gugu" are partly identified with "Kubu," the name given to groups of forest hunter-gatherers inhabiting parts of southern Sumatra (Forth 2008: 118 f., 127 f.). The matter is somewhat resolved by the fact that the creatures Besemah call "gugu" are

8 At least, the dictionary is not to be found in the Jesuit Archive (Archivum Neerlandicum Societatis Iesu) in Nijmegen, where other writings and materials relating to van Meurs career are kept (Marie-Antoinette Willemsen, pers. comm. 13 June 2011).

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called "orang hutan" – literally "forest people" – in other parts of the Barisan range (see Rintjema 2001, writing on the Kerinci village of Lempur; also Forth 2008: 135). What is more, especially in the twentieth century, speakers of the Indonesian national language have come to apply "orang hutan" (a term lexically identical to English "orangutan") to the ape *Pongo pygmaeus* (see Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings 2004, s. v. "orang"), otherwise known in Indonesian and Malay as "mawas."[9]

Food collectors like Kubu are "forest people" almost by definition, but as just noted, according to a particular dialectal usage, so are the nonhuman hominoids otherwise known as gugu. The ontological ambiguity of "gugu" is also evidenced by Marsden's alternative designation of the creature as "orang googoo," and "orang guguk," the name reported by Hagen (1908: 33, who cites an unpublished report by Saijers). Suggesting a similar dualism, Barendregt (2002: 304; 2005: 270 f.) gives the creature's name variously as "guguh," "seguguh," and "jeme guguh," a compound which appears not to have been recorded by others writing on the mystery hominoid, but which by all indications is synonymous with "orang gugu." Barendregt, who has conducted ethnographic research in the Besemah region, is (apart from the present author) the only anthropologist to have commented on the gugu. By reference to "jeme" (or "jeme hutan"; "hutan" is forest) and consistent with his further description of the hominoids as "guguh-men" (2005: 271), Barendregt construes the creatures – unconvincingly, in my view – as nothing more than an imaginary social construction cultivators employ to stigmatize human forest-dwellers, like the Kubu, by identifying them with these "human-like animals" (2002: 304). The adjective "human-like" can only denote something that is not fully human but, like a great ape, resembles a human. On the other hand, Barendregt also interprets gugu as "forest-dwelling *humans*" (2002: 304; 2005: 270; emphasis supplied), in which respect his explanation of the category as a derogatory representation of hunter-gathers, who are equally forest-dwelling humans, reveals a certain circularity.

Support for the ambiguously human status of the gugu might be found in the idea, first recorded by Marsden (1783) but also mentioned by Barendregt (2002: 304), that gugu can interbreed with humans. As recently as the late twentieth century, however, Westerners have similarly considered great apes as being identically capable. One famous case in the United States even motivated testing by American geneticists of a performing chimpanzee named "Oliver," whose reputation as half-human was disproved only when it was thus discovered that he was fully *Pan troglodytes* (Ely et al. 1998; Forth 2008: 225). Obviously, such ideas do not entail the nonexistence of the nonhuman species in question. They merely attest to the manifest physical similarity of apes and humans – a similarity which, according to some reports, could be even greater in the case of the gugu, or orang pendek.

For the most part, Besemah "jeme" (as in Barendregt's "jeme guguh") translates English "human, human being," a sense consistent with the myth recounted by Collins in which gugu, specified initially as apes, are eventually transformed into humans. But there is more to say about the term, and it is here that Jennissen's lexicon again becomes relevant. In his Holle list, Jennissen gives "jeme" (transcribed "jemĕ") both for "mankind in general" and "man, human" in the sense of a member of a particular group. The term thus evidently combines the partly distinguishable senses of Malay or Indonesian "manusia" and "orang" respectively, and indeed, according to Jennissen's listings – replicated, moreover, in Helfrich's dictionary (1904: 40, 11) – Besemah distinguishes the two senses with the cognates "manoesiĕ" and "ograng." In other words, as "member" of a group, "jeme" is synonymous with "ograng." It cannot, therefore, be inferred that "jeme guguh" refers exclusively to human beings anymore than one can make the same inference from the occurrence of "orang" in "orang pendek" – or indeed "orang hutan" as nowadays applied by Indonesian speakers to the orangutan, since Indonesians do not regard these apes as human anymore than do Westerners. Basically the same point applies, although obviously with different qualifications, to Malay "orang halus" ("halus": fine, refined, delicate, small), a reference to spiritual beings, and indeed to "orang gunung," a term Jennissen (1893) gives for mountain spirits.[10] Like English terms such as "snow man," "straw man," and perhaps even "Java man," we are dealing with metaphor.

In regard to Jennissen's listing of "gugu" as one of seven Besemah terms for monkeys and apes, another interest of Collins's remarks is the close conceptual connection they imply between gugu and the ape *Pongo pygmaeus*. Information more recent-

9 It has been suggested that "orang hutan," the source of "orangutan," derives not from a Malay designation of the ape but from a European misunderstanding (see Yule and Burnell 1968: 643 f.). This issue has yet to be fully resolved.

10 See Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings (2004) s. v. "orang," who also give "orang hutan" as: "forest dweller," "aborigine of East Sumatra;" and "orangutan *Pongo pygmaeus*."

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ly provided by linguist Bradley McDonnell (pers. comm. March–April 2010) further attests to a largely naturalistic representation of gugu as an ape or a creature associated with apes. Referring to the primates identified with the seven terms listed by Jennissen, McDonnell states that all are encountered by Besemah speakers, except for the "we-we" (cf. Jennissen's "oewewe"), which he identifies as a gibbon species, and the gugu. McDonnell further reports that, while no one he spoke to claimed to have seen these two creatures, other people are said sometimes to do so. Occasionally, people hear the we-we making a characteristic cry like a child weeping, a vocalization they ascribe to the ape's mythical derivation from a human child left behind in the jungle.[11] The resemblance of gibbon calls to the human voice is elaborated in the mythology of other Southeast Asia peoples. For example, a Malaysian aboriginal myth recounting the origin of the white-handed gibbon, explains "loud hooting noises" made by the ape as the cries of a woman crying out for her lost husband (Karim 1981: 223). "White-handed gibbon" is an alternative name for the Lar gibbon (*Hylobates lar*), an ape closely related to the agile gibbon (*Hylobates agilis*), the species to which Besemah "oewewe" refers. It is also of interest that a sound like human crying or weeping is one kind of vocalization attributed to "sedapak," another regional name for the mystery hominoid elsewhere known as "gugu" or "orang pendek" (De Santy 1925).

While gibbons are conceived as resembling humans vocally, the gugu, according to McDonnell, are described as imitating humans in other ways. If someone leaves behind an axe in the jungle, "gugu" will use it to fell a tree. Similarly, if clothing is left, a gugu will take it and put it on. This report is especially interesting, as such behavior has elsewhere been attributed to orangutans (Forth 2008: 192). Echoing a detail commonly found in descriptions of the orang pendek, McDonnell also notes that Besemah describe gugu as possessing inverted feet, so their tracks give the impression they are travelling in the opposite direction. The attribution may suggest a more fantastic or supernatural representation than that which applies to the gibbon, particularly as, in various parts of the world, inverted feet are ascribed to spiritual beings. On the eastern Indonesian island of Flores, however, inverted feet are locally attributed to the water monitor (*Varanus salvator*), a large lizard whose tracks are considered similarly deceptive. The notion probably reflects the way the lizards turn their feet to the side in locomotion (Forth 2013). But whatever the explanation, such an attribution clearly does not prove that the subject is imaginary, and it is equally noteworthy that two authorities on Sumatran orangutans have described these apes as walking in a way that similarly gives the impression of an inverted print (Rijksen and Meijaard 1999: 62 f.). As regards gibbons, it should be noted that one authority has characterized Sumatrans as regarding these apes "not as an animal but as a visible forest spirit" (Bakels 1995: 16). Hence it is by no means clear that these attested primates are conceived any less fantastically than the unidentified gugu.

11 Barendregt similarly mentions "a *wuwe* monkey" deriving from a child lost by its mother in the forest and "making a sobbing sound" (2005: 270).

Discussion and Conclusions

Jennissen's primate lexicon does not prove that "gugu" actually denotes a category of primate, nor that the entity so named exists as an extant, empirical animal. What it does indicate is that the missionary-linguist understood the term as referring to a primate of some kind (as more explicitly did Schlegel and Müller before him and Helfrich afterwards). It can hardly be doubted that Jennissen included "gugu" in his list of primate names because Besemah described the referent in a way that indicated a monkey or ape, that is, in a completely naturalistic manner suggesting an empirical animal rather than a supernatural or otherwise imaginary being. And it is equally likely that this is how Besemah themselves understood the gugu – not as spirit or some group of human beings but, fundamentally, as some sort of ape (Dutch *aap*) and as an animal ontologically equivalent to scientifically attested species of monkeys and apes, the referents of the other six terms recorded in Table 1. There is no evidence that Jennissen himself ever saw a gugu, which is to say, a creature he heard native speakers designate with this term, or which matched descriptions he had recorded from Besemah people. Given the reputed rarity of the "gugu," it is indeed most likely that he did not. But this probability only underscores the generally naturalistic character of the Besemah representation.

As shown, the six other terms for primates Jennissen recorded in addition to gugu cover the entire range of scientifically recorded species of monkeys and apes occurring in the Besemah region. From this it seems improbable that "gugu" would label a recognized species of gibbon or monkey, since these are all named by the other six terms. Focusing on different percepts (for example, visible form and vocalizations), local folk zoologists will some-

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times develop two different names for what is scientifically classified as a single species (see, e.g., Forth 2004: 32). "Gugu" could, therefore, be a synonym of another term, and as indicated, the possibly onomatopoeic name could even reflect the cries of a gibbon. But this cannot of course simply be assumed, and in fact, as described by Sumatrans, the gugu is a very much larger animal than any known gibbon.

As also shown, other evidence suggests "gugu" may refer to the orangutan, or may have done so in the nineteenth century. Since Jennissen was not clearly the source of Helfrich's subsequent identification of the term with *Pongo pygmaeus*, Helfrich may have made this independently of the missionary, although Jennissen would likely have concurred in the determination. As Jennissen did not gloss any of the primate terms he compiled for Holle, we shall probably never know what animal he identified with "gugu"; nevertheless, it could very well have been *Pongo*, and Helfrich's dictionary, compiled with the missionary's assistance, suggests that it most likely was. It is possible that, in making this identification, Helfrich, and even Jennissen, were influenced by Schlegel and Müller's earlier identification of "orang panda" with *Pongo pygmaeus* (the ape they called *Simia satyrus*). It is also possible that Helfrich at least was familiar with the English writings of Marsden and Gibson. However that may be, what is far more certain is that neither Jennissen nor Helfrich would have supported the identification if Besemah speakers had described the gugu not as an empirical creature but in a patently supernaturalistic manner.

The most obvious factor weighing against an identification of gugu with the orangutan is the paucity of evidence for the presence of this species in southern Sumatra, either in the early twentieth or nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, as Rijksen and Meijaard (1999) have shown, evidence is not entirely lacking, even for the twentieth century.[12] It is also possible that "gugu," and synonymous terms and the associated representation, could reflect a species – either *Pongo pygmaeus* or another large primate – that had become locally extinct a century or more previously and had survived only as a trace or "shadow" in local culture and in the nomenclature of folk zoology, perhaps reinforced by visual or aural encounters with other primates (most notably gibbons), sunbears, or forest-dwelling humans. This basically was the interpretation of orang pendek proposed by the Dutch colonial zoologist K. W. Dammerman (1924: 182), some 20 to 30 years after Jennissen and Helfrich wrote. In that case, gugu, as a refracted image of extinct orangutans, could be comparable to extinct Tasmanian thylacines and Zanzibar leopards (Walsh and Goldman n. d.) – of which sightings are still reported, and which some consider to be extant animals.

If, on the other hand, "gugu" does not ultimately refer to the orangutan – and if the creature is not fully fictitious or imaginary – then in view of Jennissen's and Helfrich's implicit conclusion that it denotes a primate or something sufficiently like a primate to have given them this impression, it can reasonably be considered that the category reflects an animal, most likely an ape, hitherto unrecorded by modern science. Speculation linking the recently discovered subfossil hominin *Homo floresiensis* with local Flores images – most notably the one labeled "ebu gogo" (whose name, as noted, cannot plausibly be linked with "gugu") – has raised the question of whether the "orang pendek" (or "gugu") might be a creature of the same sort, that is, a relict hominoid and a non-sapiens member of the genus *Homo*. However, in view of the existence of several known ape species on Sumatra but not on Flores, and because of differences in the way local Florenese and local Sumatrans respectively represent the two creatures, this would appear, if for no other reason, highly unlikely (Forth 2008: 151 f.).

Categories like gugu or orang pendek have typically been viewed in one of two ways. Cryptozoologists (or at least the more popular variety thereof) have tended to accept them uncritically as undiscovered hominins or relict hominoids. By contrast, sceptics, whose most informed and therefore more authoritative members include both natural scientists and social scientists, tend to regard them as empirically ungrounded. In this case, the images are often dismissed as superstitious nonsense; and there are indeed many reasons why academic researchers would not be inclined to investigate. In a variant of this view, many social or cultural anthropologists tend to consider "cryptids," or mystery animals, as imaginary constructs serving some social function or cultural purpose; but even when this view is articulated (which it rarely is), it mostly remains a general position not followed by focused investigation or analysis. Ethnozoology, and especially the study of folk categories, offers an alternative to both positions. As the present discussion has shown, several European authorities – missionaries,

12 Another primatologist, and general sceptic of claims cryptozoological, gives what could be interpreted as guarded support to Rijksen and Meijaard when, citing these authorities, he says: "… it has recently been argued that there is convincing evidence of [the orangutan's] former, and perhaps continuing, occurrence well down the west coast [of Sumatra]" (Groves 2001: 300).

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linguists, and zoologists – have explicitly or implicitly understood "gugu" and synonymous terms as designating an empirical primate. On the evidence of Jennissen's lexicon, and later Helfrich's, so do Besemah speakers themselves, and for this reason alone – and in the absence of a coherent anthropological explanation of why Besemah would recognize a creature with no or little grounding in empirical reality – it would be imprudent to dismiss the gugu as zoologically nonexistent. In the absence of field research into local species, studies of folk zoological nomenclature cannot of course independently confirm the existence of empirical species corresponding to their component categories. But, as in this case, they can contribute to a reframing of problems and thus to prospective resolutions. In this way, they may facilitate not only an anthropological understanding of categories whose referents are uncertain but, indirectly, contribute to scientific zoology as well.

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